

CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

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VOL. I.

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you—JOHN xxiii. 34.

Thoughts on Genuine Religion.

Chiefly compiled from the posthumous Works of Bishop Watson.
(Continued from last number.)

My religion is not founded, I trust, in presumption, but in piety. I cannot look upon the author of my existence in any other light than as the most commiserating parent; not extreme to mark what is done amiss, not implacable, not revengeful, not disposed to punish past offences where the heart abhors them, but ready, with the utmost benignity, to receive into his favour every repentant sinner.

By the constitution of nature, which may properly be considered as indicative of the will of God, all excess in sensual indulgences, tends to the depravation of the mind, and to the debilitation of the body, and may on that account be esteemed repugnant to the will of God. This repugnancy is made more apparent by the gospel. Now all our happiness in this world, and in the world to come, depending ultimately on the will of God, every one may see a moral necessity of conforming his actions to that will. But, as the will of God has no degree of selfishness in it, is not excited on any occasion to gratify the resentment or any other passion of the Supreme Being, (as often happens in the will of man,) I cannot but believe, that a change of temper, accompanied by a change of conduct, is all that God requires of us, in order to be restored, after our greatest transgressions, to his perfect acceptance.

We know not in what the felicity of the next world will consist; but we do know that it will not consist in the gratification of our present senses; yet God is not a harsh master, for he hath furnished us with abundant means of present enjoyment; and had every enjoyment of sense been sinful, he certainly would never have given us senses nor objects adapted to them: he hath

done both, and he requires from us such a moderation in the use of them, as may preserve our minds from being so addicted to them, as to prevent us from having any relish for the duties of benevolence and holiness; in the exercise of which, it is not improbable that our future happiness may consist.

The love of God casteth out fear; let us once bottom our principle of action on the desire of obeying him, and though we may be impelled by our passions to occasional deviations from what is right, yet this obliquity of conduct will not continue long; the hope of living under his fatherly kindness and protection, will bring us to a rational sense of duty, to a just confidence of acceptance with him.

There is much mechanism in our constitution,—our thoughts are influenced by the state of the body to a degree, and in a manner, which no philosophy can explain. A bodily infirmity produces in the minds of some men a dejection of spirits, a despondency of sentiment, which other men, with equal or superior cause for dejection and despondency, and under apparently equal bodily infirmity, feel not at all. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for beings such as we are, to account for this difference, but we may be persuaded by this, that God, who made us, knows this diversity of temper, and will make a kind and fatherly allowance for it, and not impute more than is just to him whose mind is oppressed by unreasonable apprehensions, originating, probably, in corporal imbecility.

Both reason and revelation instruct us to believe that the Creator of the universe wills the happiness of his creatures, not for his own sake, but for theirs. It would be impious to suppose that our vices could disturb his peace, or our virtues augment his felicity; this would be to make God with the passions of a man, to render

the infinite perfection of the Creator dependent on the imperfection of the creature. When, therefore, we read of the punishment denounced in the Scriptures against all kinds of wickedness, we may properly consider the threatening as the gracious warning of a wise and affectionate father, rather than as the tyrannical declarations of a cruel and vindictive God. "Transgress and die" is a positive law, be vicious and be miserable, is a natural law; they are equally the means of God's moral government of free agents; the latter is intimated to us by reason, the former is promulgated in the gospel, and they are, like their author, both of them immutable. But these are not the only laws of God's moral government; there is another intimated to us by reason, and clearly made known to us by the gospel, and it is a law which mitigates the severity of the others, which administers consolation to our fears, and strength to our inability—it is this. Repent and be forgiven,—turn away from wickedness, do that which is lawful and right, and though you have sinned, you shall save your soul alive. This is the voice of revelation; and reason says, cease from vice, and you will lessen, if not wholly annihilate the misery attendant on it.*

With respect to repentance, divines, with the best intentions no doubt, have said more than the Scriptures will warrant, and have thereby precipitated men into despair, and consequent impenitence and hardness of heart. The state of a man, who, having left off sinful habits, returns to them again, is certainly dangerous, because it shows the strength of habit to be superior to his resolution; but I do not believe that it is any where represented in Scripture as desperate, and a return to

* Letter from Bishop Watson to the Duke of Grafton—1801.

virtue as impossible; for neither Heb. x. 38. nor 2 Peter ii. 20, 21. though frequently referred to on this point, will bear out the conclusion.

(Concluded in our next Number.)

—O—
FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

Reflections on the Extracts from Dr Lardner's Letter on the Logos, published in the Christian Messenger, page 73 to page 86.

Continued from our last number.

DR. Lardner, taking for granted that his interpretation of the form of God, was correct, (which has been shown to be not correct, but the reverse,) "only observes, if this be the meaning of the text, then 2 Cor. viii. 9. is also explained; that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor." And takes no more notice of that passage. R. C. indeed, and the authorities which he has quoted, (not from the scriptures,) have considered the poverty of Jesus Christ as consisting in his not exercising the power of working miracles for his own personal benefit. It is a pity that good men should have recourse to such a groundless conjecture, merely to give some plausibility to a favourite hypothesis, which, after all, needs more support than has yet been given to it. The scripture gives no authority for this conjecture, nor does it appear consistent with the purpose for which he was sent, that he should be empowered to work miracles when he pleased, for his own personal convenience or benefit. Having shown that the riches and the poverty of Christ respected the same thing; the Editor may perhaps think it incumbent on him, to answer, if he can, the question, how a man can be rich and poor at the same time, respecting the same things.

Dr. Lardner takes some notice of certain texts in John's Gospel. The testimony of the Baptist John i. 15. *He was before me*, and John viii. 58. *Before Abraham was I am*. I have already stated that John uses the term, *πρωτος*, eight times in his gospel, and once in his first epistle, and invariably in the sense of priority of time, and never once to signify superiority of dignity; and *πριν αβρααμ γενεσθαι*, in chap. viii. 58. must of necessity be rendered, *Before Abraham was*. John xvii. 5. *And now, Father, glorify thou me with thine own self, with the glory which I had*

with thee before the world was. On this, he observes, that "according to the Jewish phraseology, this may be very well understood, of the glory always designed for the Christ by the immutable purpose of God." On this, I would only observe, that I have no doubt that our Lord knew that it was the Father's design to restore him to the glory which he had formerly enjoyed; and he prayed for what he knew to be the design and will of his God and Father. I can only account for a man of Dr. Lardner's learning and candour, attempting, however ineffectually, to evade the force of this declaration of Jesus Christ, by a strong attachment to a favourite, but unscriptural hypothesis.

The Dr. endeavoured to obviate the arguments which had been used in support of the pre-existence of Christ, from those expressions, of his being *sent from God*, and *coming from God*; and I doubt not that these expressions, taken in connection with the scope of the scriptures, are confirmations of that pre-existence. He observes, that "we may all be said to be sent by God into the world, without the supposition of a pre-existent soul." I pass this for the present. He adds, "The Prophets especially were sent from God." That is true; but is it said of any of them that they returned or went to God? John was sent from God; but where do we read that he went or returned to God? This seems to be peculiarly said of the Christ. The Evangelist tells us, John xiii. 1—3. that *Jesus knew that his hour was come, that he should depart out of this world unto the Father; and that he was come from God, and went to God*. In chap. xvi. 28. he said, "*I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world; again I leave the world, and go to the Father*." Dr. L. observes, that "this expression is explained in chap. viii. 42. whence we perceive, that thereby is intended our Lord's divine commission. *Jesus said unto them, if God were your Father, ye would love me; for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me*." All this is very true; but the good Doctor did not observe, that as his leaving the world and going to the Father, was his ascending into heaven; so his coming forth from the Father, and coming into the world, was his descending from heaven; as the

Evangelist had stated, John iii. 13. *No one hath ascended into heaven, but he who came down from heaven; the son of man who is in heaven*. Which latter clause was literally true, when the Apostle wrote this. These passages quoted by Dr. L. were proper exemplifications of what our Lord had said, John vi. 38. *I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will; but the will of him that sent me*. I do not observe, that the Doctor has taken any kind of notice of this last passage; although it might have been expected from him; for it stands in direct opposition to the system which he held.

Our Lord had said to the Jews, *ye know not, or cannot tell, whence I came, and whither I go*. Does not the system held by Dr. L. prevent its friends from having any more knowledge of whence our Lord came, than the Pharisees had?

I do not believe that Dr. Lardner, or those who think as he did, had or have any design to do any injustice to the scriptures; but we all know that every error has a tendency to darken the mind on the subject which that error relates to. I am not altogether unacquainted with the glosses which have been put upon these, and many other passages of scripture, relating to the pre-existence of the Son of God. These are things which men will do, when they find themselves at a loss to reconcile the plain sense of scripture with their favourite hypothesis; and they may be very plausible and popular, without being true; but it is a laborious and unprofitable task, and cannot amalgamate with the sacred records. They will not stand the test of a close investigation with the scriptures.

Who was he who was in the form of God, but emptied himself of it, taking the form of a servant? Who was made like unto his brethren, sin and remorse excepted? Who was he who took part with the children in flesh and blood? These, and many similar questions do not seem to admit of satisfactory answers from that hypothesis.

Our Lord ascended with the same body and soul, in which he was raised from the dead. After his ascension, his body was changed into a glorious spiritual body; and his soul proportionably elevated, into the state of the glory which he had with the Father before the world was. Of this the

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three disciples had a transient glimpse when he was transfigured before them, to which the vision of John, Rev. i. 13—15. appears to correspond, after he had ascended up where he was before. In Phil. iii. 21. Paul says, *he shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*: does it not then appear evident that before he emptied himself of the form of God, his body and soul were in a glorious spiritual state, invested with divine power and authority; with that fulness of Divine wisdom and majesty which were suitable for the proper exercise of that authority? But the same body and soul were changed when he took on him the form of a servant, suitable to the work which he was sent to do. When finishing the work which the Father had given him to do, he prayed, John xvii. 5. to be restored to his former glorious state, and his prayer was not only granted; but most probably more excellent majesty was added to him, beyond what he had formerly enjoyed.

T.

(Concluded in our next)

—O—

A Dialogue between a Universalist and a Limitarian.

(Continued from page 107.)

Uni. You will recollect, my dear friend, that in the course of our conversation, you stated that the scriptures every where oppose the doctrine of Universal Salvation, and that reason, and the experience of all christian people, do the same. Have you taken sufficient time for the due consideration of those important statements, and have you fully satisfied yourself that reason and the experience of christian people do not oppose, but justify this sentiment which you now appear to view in more favourable light? I do not recall these particulars to your recollection because I wish you to postpone what you have just proposed, but I have a desire to know your views of them now, and the travail of your mind in relation to them.

Lim. I can assure you, dear sir, that I have not neglected the serious consideration of the subjects which you have just named. And I have no objections to giving you to understand what changes have taken place in my mind, and the views which have produced them. I have been in the habit of believing that the doctrine of Uni-

versal Salvation was the most unreasonable doctrine ever propagated in the world, the most unscriptural, and the most repugnant to the inward experience of the true christian. Indeed, I did not suppose that Universalists really believed what they pretended to; and I have utterly refused hearing them preach, and to read their writings on this account; and I never gave up this prejudice until your fair and candid replies to my communications compelled me to do it. You can hardly conceive the operations of my mind, and I am sure I can never fully express them, when I was brought to a candid impartial inquiry, in my own reflections, on the great question between us. My mind received no small shock, though I did not let you know it at the time, when I utterly failed in finding any passage of scripture, by which I should limit the word ALL in St Paul's declaration, 1 Tim. ii. 4, "Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." I had so often heard it said that this passage was limited by the plain testimony of the general tenor of scripture, that I had no doubt but I could bring an overwhelming force which would do it away at once: but to my great surprise I sought the scriptures in vain on this subject, and when I was fully satisfied that I had been deceived on this important point, I was under the necessity of calling in question many other opinions, which I now thought might be as destitute of scripture support as the one which had now so unexpectedly vanished from my mind. I have given myself time and leisure patiently to search the scriptures to find direct testimony against the doctrine of universal salvation, but I have unexpectedly found many passages which candour has compelled me to consider to be more in favour of the doctrine, than any I have been able to find, are against it; though there are many passages which still appear to favour the doctrine in which I have been traditionated, and which I am unable to reconcile with the sentiment to which I feel my mind so strongly inclined at present.

Uni. Permit me, dear sir, to express my satisfaction on finding that you have gained one important point, in which so many have failed. I mean this; you have exercised that candour

with the scriptures as to make up your mind from their general tenor, notwithstanding certain doubtful passages may appear to tend a different way. This is a rare instance, the most of people, who retain the doctrine of endless misery appear to give no weight to the abundant testimony in support of the impartial goodness and universal grace of our heavenly Father, but rely entirely on a few dark parabolical passages which the traditions of men have applied to the support of that gloomy sentiment. It is impossible for me to tell the number of such persons, who have said to me, there is one text if it can be cleared up in favour of universal salvation, I will believe the doctrine at once. One would name the parable of the sheep and goats, another that of the tares of the field, a third that of the rich man and Lazarus, &c. &c. Now in all these instances it seems that the person was willing to grant that the whole Bible would run easily in the doctrine of God's universal goodness and salvation, except the one text he named; but that he would rather this one text should rule the whole Bible, than that the whole Bible should govern this one text! But after all, the case in these instances is clear, it is superstition and vain tradition that govern the mind, and the mind controls the scriptures.

Please to excuse this interruption; you were going to say something respecting reason and the experience of Christian people relative to the doctrine of the salvation of all men, but I was so pleased to find one candid soul who could use the scriptures with the candour above described, that I felt myself constrained to mention it. Do be so good as to proceed.

(To be Continued.)

Christian Messenger.

Philadelphia, Saturday, Feb. 12, 1820.

FOR THE CHRISTIAN MESSENGER.

THE good opinion which our worthy friend T. has formed of Z. is truly grateful to the feelings of the latter; and his endeavour, in love, to correct our errors, is duly appreciated, and it will be ours to endeavour to profit by his instruction. But in order to profit by that instruction, we must first be convinced that his own position is correct.

T. has explained the term *punishment* agreeably to our understanding;

(See page 98, col. 1,) neither is there any material objection to his use of the term *eternity*, though that is not the general and common acceptation of the word, but a *continuation of duration* after the present state of existence.

In the same column T. says, "I know that more than one Universalist clergyman have endeavoured to maintain that doctrine," (meaning the doctrine that there is no punishment for sin after death; that is, "no future punishment," as had been quoted from Z.,) "which I always thought was a very great mistake, and not without danger; because it gave too much cause to the adversaries of universal salvation to say, that the doctrine led to licentiousness; and *when so preached the charge was just.*"

This is the position taken by T. But has he offered any argument to prove the position correct? Has he shown why, wherefore, or wherein, the denial of, or disbelief in, *future punishment*, led to licentiousness? If he has, his arguments have escaped our notice. He seems to take it for granted, without offering any thing in support of the fact.

We are not about to inquire, at this moment, whether the doctrine of future punishment be true or not; but only whether the preaching of it be necessary to keep people from being licentious; or whether the denying of it will lead to licentiousness? This is the charge of the adversaries of universal salvation, and T. has said that when the doctrine was so preached, *the charge was just!* Now, how does the doctrine of future punishment prevent people from being licentious? How does it operate upon their senses? Answer. Only upon the principle of fear! as it will not be pretended that it can operate in any other way! No one will pretend that sinners will love God so much better in consequence of hearing this doctrine, that they will abstain from sin out of mere *love to God!* Fear, therefore, can be the only motive, so far as this doctrine has any effect, which prevents them from being licentious. Now, if this is to be the motive, why limit the fear? why not preach up endless misery at once? for this, as a motive of fear, must certainly be greater! If, therefore, every thing must be considered licentious which does not operate upon the fears of the

creature, the doctrine of a future limited punishment is licentious; inasmuch as a limited punishment is less terrible than endless misery! And how is it possible for T., as long as he admits the necessity of the doctrine at all, to clear it from this objection? If he says, it is because a limited punishment, and that for the good of the creature, is more merciful than endless misery, he pulls upon the other cord, viz. that of *mercy*, and not *terror*. Now, if the doctrine be better because it is more merciful, then the more merciful we consider it, the better it will be. It is altogether a mistake that sinners will take the more liberty to sin because they believe God to be gracious: neither has T. shown, either from scripture or experience, that this is the case. Has he undertaken to prove that the "Universalist clergyman," of whom he speaks, is any more licentious in consequence of preaching and believing this doctrine? No! And should he undertake it, he would fail in the attempt. Did it make persecuting *Saul of Tarsus*, any more disposed to persecute, when he was informed that he was a *chosen vessel unto the Lord, to bear his name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel?* and when he was shown how *great things he must suffer for the sake of the name of the Lord?* (See Acts ix. 15, 16.) No, it did not! Neither would it render the world any more disposed to commit sin, (but disposed to the contrary, should they believe the fact,) if they should all be informed, what is undoubtedly true, that "as Isaac was, so are we the children of promise." Believing this, which certainly must be considered true before it can be believed as such, constitutes any one a believer in Christ; and it may be said of such, "Ye are all children of God by faith in Christ Jesus—There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus: and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." Gal. iv. 28, iii. 26—29. If such be the fact, where is the danger of letting the world know it at once? It will no more harm those who shall believe it hereafter, than it harms those who do believe it now. It was the promise itself which constituted Isaac a child of promise, and not his belief in

it; so it is the promise which makes us the children of promise. Our faith only enables us to anticipate the enjoyment of the blessing which is promised: hence, *we walk by faith and not by sight.* Thus far we have considered the charge of licentiousness only: the remaining part of the subject we shall consider hereafter. Z.

—O—
By Divine permission, a Lecture on the late Fire at Savannah, will be delivered by the Rev. ABNER KNEELAND, on Sunday evening next, at 7 o'clock, in the First Independent Church of Christ in Lombard street—after which a collection will be taken up for the benefit of the sufferers. Feb. 12.

POETS' CORNER.

"Our God is a consuming fire."

What can appease the Lord my God?
What mighty billows, or what flood?
Before his face they must retire,
For God is a consuming fire.

Who'll briars and thorns before him place?
These furies he'll destroy by grace:
If malice rage, his flame is higher,
For God is a consuming fire.

If floods of man's impurity,
(Though like the swelling of the sea,)
Oppose, yet love will ne'er retire,
For God is a consuming fire.

Should sin, with all its hateful rage,
In this unequal war engage;
My soul Love's triumphs should admire,
For God is a consuming fire. B.

"Let brotherly love continue."

Let party names alone,
They always gender strife—
By others' faults correct thy own,
And live a virtuous life.

What if we disagree
In non essential things?
Shall we for this at variance be,
And thus disturb our friends?

No—let contention cease,
And hateful discord end;
And strive to live in perfect peace—
Let each his way amend.

No reason can be shown
Why I should hateful be:
I disagree with every one
Who disagrees with me.

Then let me learn to love
Those whom I would oppose;
By this I'm carried far above
The envy of my foes. K.

—O—
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